On Palm Sunday

By

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Theological Summary

On Palm Sunday is a theological reflection on Matthew's Passion narrative (Year A, Revised Common Lectionary) that presents Palm Sunday as the opening moment of a decisive confrontation between ***the kingdom of God and the domination systems that order human societies****. The reflection is intentionally framed as a discussion rather than a declaration, proceeding in a Socratic spirit that refuses to presume possession of the truth, while remaining rooted in the Christian confession that* ***Truth is ultimately encountered as a Person in Christ****. The sermon situates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem within its political and theological context. Jesus is crucified for sedition: to proclaim him "King of the Jews" is to deny the ultimate authority of Caesar, for two kings cannot rule the same realm. The inscription placed above the cross names this political reality. Jesus is executed not for private piety, but for publicly embodying a rival vision of authority, loyalty, and life. This confronts hearers with an unavoidable question of collective responsibility. We are responsible not only for what we do individually, but also for what we allow, sustain, or ignore together as members of a society. The sermon therefore asks whether we will be* ***complicit in the domination systems of our own day****, or whether we will confront them by aligning ourselves with the kingdom Jesus embodies—a question rendered urgent by the increasingly divisive and alarming manifestations of those systems in the present.*

Drawing on the work of Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, Palm Sunday is interpreted as the convergence of ***two processions*** *entering Jerusalem. From the west comes Pilate with imperial cavalry, embodying Roman power, violence, and a theology that legitimates domination. From the east comes Jesus, riding a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah's vision of a king who abolishes war and commands peace. These processions represent not merely competing political regimes, but* ***competing theologies****—the kingdom of Caesar and the kingdom of God. Jerusalem itself becomes the focal point of this conflict, having become the center of a religiously legitimated domination system marked by political oppression, economic exploitation, and theological justification of inequality.*

The Passion narrative unfolds as a series of failures of perception. Betrayal, denial, abandonment, and flight are portrayed not as acts of calculated malice, but as expressions of the human condition—moments in which ***the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak****. Gethsemane stands at the center of this struggle. Jesus' anguished prayer marks not a loss of faith, but a deepening alignment with God's will, while the disciples' inability to remain awake reveals humanity's incapacity to sustain faithfulness through willpower alone.*

At the cross, the world's understanding of salvation is inverted. Jesus is mocked and told to save himself, yet it is precisely in his refusal to do so that salvation is revealed. From the perspective of appearance, the cross signifies failure and abandonment; from the perspective of reality, it discloses the power of God as self-giving love. Even the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", is understood as God's full entry into human alienation, revealing that no experience of suffering or abandonment lies outside divine presence.

With these insights in mind, the sermon gathers its meaning through four interwoven themes:

1. ***Permanence vs. change (the fleeting nature of the human condition)***
2. ***Appearance vs. reality***
3. ***Spirit vs. flesh***
4. ***God's will vs. our will***

These themes reveal the deeper conditions that make complicity or resistance possible. The reflection culminates in the ***Prayer attributed to St. Francis****, which serves not as a devotional appendix but as the ethical embodiment of the Passion's message—calling the Church to confront domination systems not by coercion, but by refusing to become what they require. Ultimately, On Palm Sunday proclaims a Gospel of* ***unconditional love and costly discipleship****, summoning believers to decide, again and again,* ***which procession they will join****.*

Author's Note

This summary was prepared by ***Microsoft Copilot (GPT-5–based)*** *at the request of the author, to present the sermon-discussion* ***On Palm Sunday*** *in a publication-ready theological form while preserving its structure, themes, and intent.*

On Palm Sunday

In the Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary the Gospel reading for Palm Sunday is Matthew's story of Jesus' trial and death. Here I discuss what I believe are two perspectives, ways of seeing the world, that run through Matthew's passion narrative out of which some themes emerge that give rise to a message in Matthew's story that I believe can be directly applied to our situation today that is both individual and political. The frame for my discussion is provided by Marcus Borg's and John Dominic Crossan's 2007 book entitled *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem*

Let us, then, consider some of the passages from the Matthew' passion narrative:

I. First we have the situation of Jesus reporting to the disciples that one of them will betray him – hand him over:

> "When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so.""

- I believe them, what about you?
- What about Judas? Believe him too?
- I believe it is worth noting that at least it seems that all will abandon Jesus in the end. Here, the question is from what perspective – on the basis of what perspective?

II. We have the Last Supper:

> "While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.""

- Here we have Jesus giving meaning to what is taking place and it is that of his giving himself, all of himself to them/others.
- The question, again, is from what perspective – on the basis of what perspective?

III. We have the seen at Gethsemane:

"Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.""

- Here we have Jesus asking "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; [From what perspective?] and then stating "yet, not what I want, but what you want." [From what perspective?] Here, then, do we have a conversion of sorts? Perhaps not, but definitely a shift in perspective.
- Here the question is from what and to what perspective?
- Here we also have the Disciples failing to stay awake with Jesus at his greatest hour of need. An abandonment of sorts, don't you think? Not once, but THREE times!
- But a willing/chosen abandonment? I don't think so. For we also have, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."
- Do we have here, then, the spirit speaking what the flesh by its will power alone cannot do?
- Notably, in Marks Passion narrative at 14:30 the disciples are somewhat perplexed for they did not know what to say to him. "And once more he came and <u>found them sleeping</u>, <u>for their eyes were very heavy; and *they did not know what to say to him*</u>." And so we, too, find ourselves speechless before God when our flesh cannot do on its unaided willpower alone what our spirit wills.
- The question, again, is from what perspective – on the basis of what perspective?

IV. We have Judas' betrayal – handing over of Jesus.

"While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

> At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled."

- With a kiss none the less!
  We also have it not being ok to defend the flesh with violence, at least it seems.
- And we have the great desertion, "All of them deserted him and fled."
- What about here? Do they willingly flee? Do we have a case of the spirit being willing but the flesh being weak?
- The question, again, is from what perspective – on the basis of what perspective does one so act?

V. We have the issue of Kingship, who rules - Rome via Pilate and the priests, or Jesus, God, and the underlying issues with respect to who rules the Jews that are social and has to do with Kingdoms. Here, again, we have two perspectives. Let us consider these in some depth as often they are ignored to our detriment. To do so let us consider some passages/quotes from Borg and Crossan's (2007) book entitled *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem.*

[Note: What follows are some rather LONG quotes within which I make comments. I must confess that I am not the best writer and I I fear any attempt by me to summarize would entail loss of essential meaning]:

> Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year of 30. It was the beginning of the week of Passover, the most sacred week of Jewish year. In the centuries since, Christians have celebrated this day as Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week. With its climax of Good Friday and Easter, it is the most sacred week of the Christian year.
>
> One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount Olives, cheered by his followers. Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and his followers came from the peasant class. They had journeyed to Jerusalem from Galilee, about a hundred miles to the north, a journey that is the central section and the central dynamic of Mark's gospel. Mark's story of Jesus and the kingdom of God has been aiming for Jerusalem, pointing toward Jerusalem. It has now arrived.
>
> On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. Jesus' procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate's proclaimed the power of empire. The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus' crucifixion.
>
> Pilate's military procession was a demonstration of both Roman imperial power and Roman imperial theology. Though unfamiliar to most people today, the

imperial procession was well known in the Jewish homeland in the first century. It was the standard practice of the Roman governors of Judea to be in Jerusalem for the major Jewish festivals. They did so not out of empathetic reverence for the religious devotion of their Jewish subjects, but to be in the city in case there was trouble. There often was, especially at Passover, a festival that celebrate the Jewish people's liberation from an earlier empire (from the Egyptian bondage).

(…).

Pilates procession displayed not only imperial power, but also Roman imperial theology. According to this theology, the emperor was not simply the ruler of Rome, but the Son of God. It began with the greatest of the emperors, Augustus, who ruled Rome from 31BCE to 14BCE. His father was the God Apollo, who conceived him in his mother, Atia. Inscriptions refer to him as "son of God," "lord" and "savior," one who had brought "peace on earth." After his death, he was seen ascending into heaven to take his permanent place among the gods. His successors continued to bear divine titles, including Tiberius, the emperor from 14 to 37 CE and thus emperor during the time of Jesus's public activity. For Rome's Jewish subjects, Pilate's procession embodied not only a rival social order, but also a rival theology.

(…). As Mark tells the story in 11:1-11, it is a prearranged "counter procession." Jesus planned it in advance. As Jesus approaches the city from the east at the end of the journey from Galilee, he tells two of his disciples to go to the next village and get him a colt they will find there, one that has never been ridden, that is, a young one. They do so, and Jesus rides the colt down the Mount of Olive to the city surrounded by a crowd of enthusiastic followers and sympathizers, who spread their cloaks, strew leafy branches on the road, and shout, "Hosanna ! Blessed is the one who come in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestors David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!

The meaning of the demonstration is clear, for it uses symbolism from the prophet Zechariah in the Jewish bible. According to Zechariah, a king would be coming to Jerusalem (Zion) "humble, and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (9:9). In Mark, the reference to Zechariah is implicit. Matthew, where he treats Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, makes the connection explicit by quoting the passage: "Tell the daughter of Zion, look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Matt. 21:5, quoting Zech. 9:9). The rest of the Zechariah passage details what kind of king he will be:

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations (9:10). This king, riding on a donkey, will banish war from the land - no more chariots, war-horses, or bows.

Commanding peace to the nations, he will be a king of peace. Here "the nations" are the gentile nations, especially the gentile empires that had ruled over the Jewish people. Jesus' procession deliberately countered what was happening on the other side of the city. Pilate's procession embodied the power, glory, and violence of the empire that ruled the world. Jesus' procession embodied an alternative vision, the kingdom of God. This contrast - between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar - is central not only to the gospel of Mark, but to the story of Jesus and early Christianity.

The confrontation between these two kingdom continues through the last week of Jesus' life. As we all know, the week ends with Jesus' execution by the powers who ruled his world. Holy Week is the story of this confrontation. But before we unfold Mark's story of Jesus' last week, we must first set the stage. For this, Jerusalem is central. (Borg and Crossan 1-5)

But Jerusalem the city of God also acquired negative associations, because, beginning in the half century after King David, it became the center of "domination system. The phrase "domination system" is shorthand for the most common form of social system - away of organizing a society - in ancient and premodern times, that is, preindustrial agrarian societies. It names a social system marked by three major features:

1) Political oppression. In such societies the many were ruled by the few, the powerful and wealthy elites; the monarchy, nobility, aristocracy, and their associates. Ordinary people had no voice in the shaping of the society.
2) Economic exploitation. A high percentage of the society's wealth went into the coffers of the wealthy and powerful - between one-half and two-thirds of it. How did they manage to do this? By the way they set the system up, through the structures and laws about land ownership, taxation, indenture of labor through debt, and so forth.
3). Religious legitmation. In ancient societies, these systems were legitimated, or justified, with religious language. The people were told the king ruled by divine right, the king was the Son of God, the social order reflected the will of God, the powers that be were ordained by God. Of course, religion sometimes became the source of protest against these claims. But in most premodern societies known to us, religion has been used to legitimate the place of the wealthy and powerful in the social order over which they preside.

There is nothing unusual about this form of society. (…). And one could make a good case that in somewhat different form it remains with us today.

In this sense “domination systems” are normal, not abnormal, and thus can be called the “normalcy of civilization.” Thus we will use both phrases to name the socio-economic-political order in which ancient Israel, Jesus, and early Christianity lived. “Domination system” calls attention to its central dynamic: the political and economic domination of the many by a few and the use of

religious claims to justify it. The religious version is that God has set society up this way; the secular version is that this is "the way things are" and the best they can be for everybody. "Normalcy of civilization" calls attention to how common it is. (Borg and Crossan 7-8)

After abolishing the Jewish monarchy, Rome initially ruled through the high priest, the temple, and a local aristocracy centered in the temple. This was Rome's traditional practice throughout its territory: appointing local collaborators from the indigenous population to rule on Rome's behalf. … . There was one additional condition: they were responsible for collecting and paying the annual tribute owed to Rome. (Borg and Crossan 12-13)

(…). (…) and with Archelaus gone, Rome assigned this rule to the temple and its authorities. (…).

The temple replaced Herodian rule as the center of the local domination system. (…). (…) the temple was now at the center of local collaboration with Rome. It had the defining features of ancient domination systems: *rule by a few, economic exploitation, and religious legitimation.* And it was a two-layered domination system: the local domination system centered in the temple was subsumed under the imperial domination system that was Roman rule. As such, it owed "tribute" to the emperor, both loyalty and money; and was thus a tributary domination system.

The *few* who *ruled* at the top of the local system were the temple authorities, headed by the high priest, including members of aristocratic families. Mark's terminology for the temple authorities is "the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes" (e.g., 14:53). The chief priests came from high-ranking priestly families and the elders from wealthy lay families. (…). The scribes associated with "chief priests" and "elders" were a literate class who worked for them as legal experts, record keepers, and lower-level administrators. Mark also refers to a "council," a governing body in Jerusalem composed largely or completely of these groups. (Borg and Crossan 15-16) *[Me- Exploitation, Den of thieves]*

[Comment: So, Jesus is, at least in part with what he does, is protesting the domination system and two sources of its maintenance, namely, Rome and roman authorities and local authorities.]

Importantly, the issue as we describe the wealthy and powerful is not whether they – in our case, the Jerusalem authorities centered in the temple – were "corrupt," if by that we mean an individual failing. As individuals, the wealthy and powerful can be good people – responsible, honest, hard-working, faithful to family and friends, interesting, charming, and good-hearted. The issue is not their individual virtue or wickedness, but the role they played in the domination system. They shaped it, enforced it, and benefited from it.

[Comment: as can we today].

The high priest and the temple authorities had a difficult task. … . Their role was to be the intermediaries between a local domination system and an imperial domination system.

It was a delicate balancing act. They needed to collaborate enough with Rome to keep Rome happy, but not so much as to anger their Jewish subjects. … . It is easy to imagine a responsible official saying, as the high priest Caiaphas is reported to say in John's gospel, "It is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (11:50). Why Caiaphas says this can be seen from a previous verse that shows fear of Roman intervention: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation(11:48). (Borg and Crossan 19)

[COMMENT: We, too, face such decisions. Will we operate from within the context of what could be seen as the domination system of our day maintaining that this is just the way things are as we watch, for example, of people who are homeless and have nothing to eat – thereby being complicit with the domination system of our day and turning away from God in Christ - even as we work at the soup kitchen to feed the homeless; or will we move to do what is necessary to overturn the domination system so that such soup kitchens are no longer needed – again as we continue to work at the soup kitchen? Notably, another way to state this question is as follows: Will we support the domination system of our day or will we follow Christ and confront it so that no one is left wanting regardless of the circumstance – thereby bringing the Kingdom of God to all we encounter and, in so doing, abide and live therein as one in Christ in the Unity of His Holy Spirit?]

Jerusalem becomes central in the section of Mark that tells the story of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. It begins roughly halfway through Mark with Peter's affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah. The next two and a half chapters, leading to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, are about what it means to follow Jesus, to be a genuine disciple. Mark develops this theme by weaving together several subthemes:

- Following Jesus means following on *the way.*
- *The way* leads to Jerusalem.
- Jerusalem is the place of *confrontation with the authorities.*
- Jerusalem is the place of *death and resurrection." (pp. 26-27)*

To underline the centrality of these chapters that speak of what it means to follow Jesus, Mark frames them with two stories of *seeing,* of blind men regaining their sight through Jesus. …, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, beseeches Jesus "My teacher, let me see again!" Then Mark tells us, "Immediately he regained his sight *and followed Jesus on the way"* (8:22-26; 10:46-52). The

framing is deliberate, the meaning is clear: *to see* means to see that *the way* involves following Jesus to Jerusalem.

Thus we have the twofold theme that leads to Palm Sunday. Genuine discipleship, following Jesus, means following him to Jerusalem, the place of (1) confrontation with the domination system and (2) death and resurrection. These are the two themes of the week that follows, Holy Week. Indeed, these are the two themes of Lent and of the Christian life. (Borg and Crossan 29-30).

VI. We have people mocking of Jesus and telling him to save himself:

> "Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, `I am God's Son.'" The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way."

- But what would it be for Jesus to "save" himself?
- Depends on your perspective, doesn't it? On what you believe to be the truth about what is?

VII. We have the crowd choosing a "notorious prisoner" to be released over Jesus.

> "Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!""

- Again, this is in stark contrast to palms being laid before Jesus as He entered the city with palms being placed before Him and the crowds shouting: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" What changed?

VIII. Finally, we have Jesus saying: ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"***

- At this point, who hasn't abandoned Jesus? Has not even God abandoned him? Or, at least, doesn't it seem that Jesus believes God has?
- Again, what perspective does Jesus have here? What is implied here about Jesus' beliefs concerning what it would be for God not to forsake him?
- Of what importance is his perspective here for us?

With the aforementioned in mind, I believe there are themes that run through the story that I think shine light on a message we can take from it namely:

1. Permanence vs. change (fleeting) (the human condition),

2. Appearance vs. reality,

3. Spirit vs. flesh,

4. God's will vs. our will.

- We have at the outset Jesus asking God to spare Him what is to come (the human condition/our will) and then His acceptance of God's will for Him.

- We have the Apostles unable to stay awake with Jesus and support Him in prayer (Spirit vs. flesh).

- We have what seems like betrayal by Judas with a kiss none the less.

- We have in the liturgy of the palms Jesus entering esteemed, palms put before where He goes and by the end we have Him seen in the opposite light. (Permanence vs. change)

- We have abandonment of Jesus by Peter not once but three times.

- And so, we see that human support is fleeting, changes. God's love for us is not – it persists, it persists to death. And it does so regardless of what we do, which, notably, is made explicit in Luke's passion narrative when Jesus says, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.".

- Finally, we have Jesus being mocked and told he cannot even save himself. But in His death, He is the salvation of all (appearance vs. reality).

- Most notably, however, is that it is for those that are persecuting Him that He dies, so that they might have eternal life.

In the Passion narratives – here Matthew in particular – we find Jesus experiencing much of what we go through in our own lives – asking to be spared, unjustly being persecuted, wondering where God has gone, not seeing reality and turning away from God on the basis of appearance – though in Jesus we find the result of not turning away from God. And it is in the example of the rock on which the Church is built, Peter, that we see this most clearly. He was certain he could not possibly betray Jesus, yet he does so three times, and weeps at what he has done.

And it was a confrontation played out in Peter then and in ourselves today. Reality is that by following Christ we find life and we find death otherwise. Appearance, on the other hand, can be quite the opposite. When faced with the possibility of physical death within the context of the secular perspective we, in an attempt to save ourselves, as did Peter, turn away from God, and in the process crucify ourselves. Whereas, when, seeing reality, we act in ways that would seem to lead us to being crucified we find our salvation. Bearing our cross we find life in Christ here and now and everlasting. Often, however, as did Peter, we do the former and deny Christ. For we are blind to the Truth that actual life now and hereafter comes from following Christ on *the way*, regardless of the consequences of our so doing.

But God understands, for He became like us in Jesus – it might be said at least in part to be sure we know He understands. When we turn away, He forgives us for Christ is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. And He is with us always, even when it seems He has gone. All this points to a message I think runs through the story that God intends for us. It is this: **regardless of the sacrifice, no matter what you do, I understand, forgive, love and am with you always. In this message God is both *calling us to life in Christ and telling us how to answer His call*. We find life and live in Christ to the extent that we are towards/for each other as Christ by example is for us – when, regardless of what others do, we, regardless of the sacrifice, seek to understand, forgive, love, and be with them always. *[Especially as we as one people of the world in the face of war persecution, and social unrest]***

In all the passion narratives one theme is present. It is that of God's unconditional love for us writ large in all that Jesus does. How then shall we respond? Will we return in kind out of our love for Him inspired/motivated by what we see He has done for us, giving ourselves to Him in the same way He gives Himself to us in Christ by our so giving ourselves to each other so that in all we do His unconditional love for us is made manifest to all we encounter at all times, in all places, regardless of the circumstances? Which is to ask, will we thus follow Jesus on *the way*? Will we eat with Him Maundy Thursday evening, follow Him to His death on the cross Good Friday, will we then see that His tomb is empty on Easter Sunday, and will we celebrate by going forth renewed to bring the Kingdom of God to all we encounter? How, then, shall we answer?

"Two processions entered Jerusalem on that day. The same question, the same alternative, faces those who would be faithful to Jesus today. Which procession are we in? Which procession do we want to be in? This is the question of Palm Sunday and of the week that is about to unfold." (Borg and Crossan 30). And this is the question that today we face!

Let us pray,

A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis

May God make us instruments of His peace:
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much
Seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

BLESSINGS and PEACE to ALL!!!
+MWH

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